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To cite this article: Christopher J. Przemieniecki, Samantha Compitello & Josiah D. Lindquist (2019): Juggalos - Whoop! Whoop! A Family or A Gang? A Participant-Observation Study on an FBI Defined 'Hybrid' Gang, Deviant Behavior, DOI: [10.1080/01639625.2019.1596533](https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2019.1596533)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2019.1596533>



Published online: 29 Mar 2019.



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Juggalos - Whoop! Whoop! A Family or A Gang? A Participant-Observation Study on an FBI Defined 'Hybrid' Gang

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the Juggalos and their controversial gang designation as defined by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The Juggalos are devoted fans of the music group Insane Clown Posse, but law enforcement officials have identified Juggalos as a “hybrid” gang. A participant observation study was conducted in the fall of 2017 during the Juggalo March in Washington D.C. This protest rally was a response to challenge the gang classification and demonstrate to others that Juggalos are “a family and not a gang.” The authors observed Juggalo behaviors that were not consistent with a gang; but rather consistent with the characteristics of identifying a gang, as well as behaviors that were deviant.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 7 March 2018

Accepted 15 July 2018

Introduction

Street gangs in the United States has been an ongoing problem for communities and law enforcement officials for decades. The challenges that police anti-gang units face include, drug trafficking, violent crimes, gangs terrorizing neighborhoods and the persistence of gangs evading law enforcement's efforts to combat the problem. In 2005, the National Gang Intelligence Center (NGIC) was created by Congress to help local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies address this growing problem. Directed by the U.S. Attorney General, the NGIC is an information center administered by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) that collects, analyzes, and disseminates reports about gangs and alerts law enforcement agencies of the latest gang trends in the United States. Information about gangs and gang-related concerns are reported to the FBI from the following agencies: the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Bureau of Prisons, the United States Marshals Service, the Directorate of Border and Transportation Security of the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and State and local law enforcement officials, prosecutors, Federal, State, and local probation and parole offices, Federal, State, and local prisons and jails; and any other entity deemed as appropriate (see *34 U.S. Code § 41507*). This multi-agency approach integrates and serves as “a central intelligence resource for gang information and analytical support” (NGIC 2011: 4) for the National Gang Threat Assessment Report. This report is then disseminated to law enforcement personnel throughout the country.

In 2011, the National Gang Threat Assessment Report identified the emergence of a new gang, a “loosely-organized hybrid gang” known as the ‘Juggalos’ (NGIC 2011: 21). Juggalos were included in the report because law enforcement agencies had identified them in 21 states. Only Pennsylvania, Utah, Arizona, and California officially defined the group as a legitimate street gang (NGIC 2011). However, according to Kang (2013), it was a 2008 FBI memo that referred to a “gathering of Juggalos” at an Insane Clown Posse (ICP) festival in Cave-in-Rock, IL that first caught the attention of law enforcement officials. The FBI claimed that “the Juggalos [are] a legitimate gang with a large

following ... [who] follow the ICP in almost a religious manner” (Kang 2013). This documented memo by the FBI in Illinois further promulgated a 14-month investigation on Juggalos in Salt Lake City, UT. The investigation prompted law enforcement officials to conclude that ‘Juggalos’ and ‘Juggalettes’ (female followers of ICP) are not just a “hybrid” gang but a “violent street gang” numbering in the thousands (Kang 2013).

The identification of Juggalos as a street gang is contrary to how music fans of ICP view themselves. Juggalos are avid followers of the rap group, ICP. Juggalos are similar to other fan-based groups such as the ‘Deadheads’ who follow the Grateful Dead or ‘Parrotheads’ who follow Jimmy Buffett. In fact, there are many fan-based groups with unique names such as the KISS Army, Lady Gaga’s ‘Little Monsters’, Justin Bieber’s ‘Beliebers’, Taylor Swift’s ‘Swifties’, Beyoncé’s ‘Beyhives’ and the ‘Maggots’ of Slipknot (Conradt 2011). While these music groups and artists have a devoted following of fans, the reputation of some of these fan-based groups are negative, and in some cases violence is often associated with them (Beyerlein 2009). Though some of these fans might engage in deviant behavior, and sometimes illegal behavior, none have been assigned the label of a street gang like the Juggalos.

In the case against the Juggalos, ICP’s music is less appealing to the public because of their violent, vulgar and destructive messages in their lyrics that include killings, beatings, violence and sexual degradation. Juggalos are typically viewed as social outcasts or misfits in society and are thus believed to be prone to criminal activity (Chang 2013). In fact, the NGIC (2011: 21) report states that “most crimes committed by Juggalos are sporadic, disorganized, individualistic, and often involve simple assault, personal drug use and possession, petty theft, and vandalism.” The report also suggests that “a small number of Juggalos are forming more organized subsets and engaging in more gang-like criminal activity, such as felony assaults, thefts, robberies, and drug sales” (NGIC 2011: 21).

Despite the limited number of Juggalos engaged in criminal activity when compared to other street gangs such as MS-13, Latin Kings, and Bloods and Crips, the 2011 NGIC report had a devastating effect on ICP and some Juggalos. As a result of the gang threat assessment report, several devoted ICP fans were stopped and detained for extended periods of time by police, were denied employment, were terminated from their jobs, lost custody battles, and were denied acceptance into the military because of their “perceived” gang association with ICP and the Juggalos (Sciarretto 2012). Supporters of ICP blame the law enforcement for all of the legal problems and negative stigma associated with the gang classification. These issues prompted ICP and their fans, with the support of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) to file a civil lawsuit against the FBI and the Department of Justice (DOJ) for wrongfully identifying and classifying Juggalos as a gang. Furthermore, the plaintiffs (ICP) argued that the FBI and DOJ violated their constitutional rights. The civil suit began in the Eastern District Court of Michigan in 2014 and reached the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals in October 2017.

Background information: who are the juggalos and ICP?

To better understand the reasons behind the lawsuit, it is important to explain who the Juggalos are and who is Insane Clown Posse. Insane Clown Posse (ICP) rose from menial beginnings to become a successful underground music group. Despite this success, ICP has self-described themselves as the “most hated band in the world” (Ballard-Brown 2017; McCasker 2013). The duo behind ICP are childhood friends Joseph Bruce (aka, Violent J) and Joseph Utsler (aka, Shaggy 2 Dope). Bruce and Utsler grew up in low-income neighborhoods in the outskirts of Detroit during the 1970s. They lived in a city facing economic decline, poor living conditions, high crime rates and violence. They also came from abusive homes, had no father figures, got into fights, were pressured to join street crews (i.e., gangs), and were arrested for various crimes early in their careers (Miller 2016).

In 1991, the duo formed Insane Clown Posse, a horror/rap or “horrorcore” genre music group. Horrorcore genre involves horror themes (e.g., evil clowns, bloody knives) and dark imagery to promote the music and band. Using clowns and other demonic figures, the duo created the ‘Dark Carnival’ where Bruce and Utsler serve as the spiritual messengers for their followers, and warn

others about the dangers of living a destructive lifestyle. ICP also refers to their albums as “Joker Cards” and the theme of each album is part of a larger story (Murray 2015).

To date, ICP has released eight “Jokers Cards” (i.e., albums), including singles and compilations of their music. Despite not having a major record label or any airplay on the radio, ICP has managed to claim three gold and two platinum records, reaching *Billboard's Hot 100* with the rap song titled, ‘Santa’s a Fat Bitch’ (ranked #67 on 12/12/1997) (Walton 2015). Despite their success, *USA Today* named two of ICP’s albums as the “Worst Albums of the Year” (Dodero 2010) and music critics routinely refer to the “Clowns” as the “worst band of all time” (Rabin 2015; Stuart 2013). However, the popularity of ICP in the early 1990s attracted music label Hollywood Records, a subsidiary of Disney, to promote the group and their albums. But, when ICP released their fourth album, *The Great Milenko*, Disney censored ICP by pulling the albums from shelves in objection to their violent-laden lyrics (Helman 2017). This action led ICP to create their own recording company, Psychopathic Records, which has since become an extremely successful independent label within the music industry.

As ICP’s popularity grew, they toured the country and sold merchandise and memorabilia to popular mall vendors such as Hot Topic and Spencer’s gift stores. This self-promotion and determination to build a controversial rap group, generated a large following known as Juggalos. It is estimated that there are over one million Juggalos following the music of ICP (Bringer and Walton 2015). The name ‘Juggalo’ is said to have originated at a 1994 concert in New York where “Violent J switched up the lyrics for their song *The Juggla* on stage by saying “You can’t f*** with the Juggla ... What about you, Juggalo? Are there any Juggalos in here?” (TJF Staff Report 2016). While Juggalos are devoted followers of ICP, their appearance is perceived as deviant. Similar to death metal bands, punk rock or Goth groups, the overuse of the color black and the allure of death, blood, violence, and other demonic themes usually reserved for Halloween are some of the common characteristics of a Juggalo. The Juggalo subculture includes wearing clown-like face paint or masks, wearing clothing with the Hatchet Man symbol (a running man wielding a hatchet), and communicating with one another using a unique shout or chant called “Whoop Whoop” calls. Juggalos are mostly comprised of young, white, working-class males but there is a large following of female fans (dubbed ‘Juggalettes’) (Raferty 2010). Juggalos also tend to feel misunderstood by others, often viewed as outsiders because of their weight, looks, sexual orientation, upbringing and interest in music (Anderson 2009; Miller 2016; Raferty 2010). Although the original Juggalo fan-base in Detroit was homogenous, Juggalos are more diverse and an inclusive subculture, where the notion of family is the most important quality (Miller 2016).

Despite all the negative criticism, ICP continues to write, produce and promote their music with the Juggalos continually supporting them. Currently, there are handful of documentaries and video shorts about ICP and the Juggalos. There is also feature-film set to be released in the fall of 2018 called *Family* which is about a young 12-year old who runs away to be a Juggalo. The film was recently featured at the 2018 SXSW Film Festival in Austin, Texas. ICP has also performed at Woodstock 1999 and wrestled for numerous entertainment wrestling organizations such as the World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) and World Championship Wrestling (WCW). ICP also operated their own national wrestling association known as Juggalo Champion Wrestling (Tamm 2000). Perhaps what ICP is best known for, particularly to law enforcement, is their summer music festival known as ‘The Gathering of the Juggalos.’ This annual event draws tens of thousands of fans from all around the world for a 4-day, 24-hour music festival, that includes other activities. The *Washington Post* described it as combining the “the communal spirit of Burning Man, the debauchery of a NASCAR infield and the edgy theater of a freak show” (Jouvenal 2017). ICP and the Juggalos are also frequently discussed in the media as a deviant subculture. Books, documentaries, journalists’ exposés and entertainment magazines have published articles about Violent J and Shaggy 2 Dope and the culture of the Juggalo lifestyle. One unique feature at ICP concerts is how Juggalos partake in a ritualistic tradition where members of ICP on stage spray fans with hundreds of bottles of Faygo-brand soda into the crowds.

The growth of the Juggalos has been steady and unassuming, but some are calling it the “dirty secret that mainstream America has tried to sweep under the carpet” (Pattison 2010). Much of the interest into the Juggalo culture and lifestyle is because of ICP’s on-stage theatrical performances, but also with how the duo interact with their fans. ICP regularly meets with Juggalos at concerts and music festivals, they write autobiographies detailing their struggles and successes (Violent and Echlin 2003) and promote documentaries about the Juggalos. This type of transparency is key to its fan base and ICP’s success. ICP’s down-to-earth approach and their face-to-face interactions with fans results in Juggalos considering themselves a “family.” Freelance writer Mitchell Sunderland (2015) best describes the Juggalos and explains how they connect with each other as a “family” in *Vice Magazine*:

“You don’t *become* a Juggalo; you’re born one. Before ICP made them aware that they were part of the Juggalo family, they felt like outcasts. They were too fat, too ugly, and too poor to even hang with the punks or the comic-book nerds. Juggalo culture gave them an identity, while also transforming the stigmas of their scrub-life into something to be proud of...”

Previous research on the juggalos

The literature exploring ICP and the Juggalos typically fall into three categories: the mass media’s perspective (i.e., journalistic approach) that examines the lifestyle of ICP and the Juggalos, the academic perspective (i.e. scholarly literature), and the legal/law enforcement approach. However, most of the information about Juggalos comes from various media outlets. News stories, music magazines articles, and documentaries are quickly found in any “Juggalo” *Google* search. There are also numerous books written about the band and those who follow ICP (see Cronin and Dodero 2013; Legel 2013; Rock and Thompson 2013; Violent and Echlin 2003). A more recent exploration into the world of ICP and the Juggalo’s is Steve Miller’s (2016) book *Juggalo: Insane Clown Posse and the World They Made*. The author gives a detailed account of this unique subculture, the inner workings of ICP, and those self-described Juggalos who follow the ‘Most Hated Band in the World.’ Bringer and Walton (2015) also offer a unique approach, exploring the history of ICP, defining horrorcore, examining Juggalo culture, and outlining the facts of the lawsuit against the FBI/DOJ.

While most reports about ICP and the Juggalos are derived from the media’s perspective, the less expansive perspective are the scholarly works in academics. There are very few studies that examine the Juggalos. Petering et al. (2017) explored the differences between homeless youth who identified themselves as Juggalos to those non-Juggalo homeless youth. Their findings revealed that Juggalos are prone to various mental health issues, trauma, and violence but the authors were clear to point out that this was only a small subset to a much larger Juggalo population and should be viewed with caution. While Petering et al. (2017) admit they only looked at homeless youth in Los Angeles, the authors are the first to provide an empirical analysis over the subculture including collecting demographic data that until now has only been speculated by the media. Petering et al. (2017) found that the typical demographics of Juggalos were 21 years old, male, white and most were in child protective services or foster care. Juggalos were also more likely to identify as LGBTQ, use methamphetamine and ecstasy, have a higher rate of prescription drug misuse and chronic marijuana use, and have higher rates of negative mental health symptoms and trauma experiences (Petering et al. 2017: 646).

As for the legal/law enforcement perspective on Juggalos, the 2011 National Gang Threat Assessment Report was not the only government report, nor the first, to identify Juggalos as a criminal gang. In 2010, the New Jersey Department of Law & Public Safety Gang Intelligence Report found that Juggalos were the most active gang recruiting in the Atlantic County, NJ area (New Jersey Department of Law and Public Safety 2010: 45). The Rocky Mountain Information Network also produced similar findings on the increase of criminal Juggalo gangs which included the intrusion onto Native American land in Arizona (Vasey 2010). The Arizona Department of Public Safety Gang Immigration Intelligence Team Enforcement Mission reported Juggalo criminal gangs in the Navajo Nation, the Tohono O’odham Nation, and Fort McDowell Reservation (Vasey 2010).

The only article examining the legal definition of Juggalos defined as a gang is Fudge's (2014) review of the Juggalo characteristics and how it relates to the California Street Terror Enforcement and Protection Act (STEP Act). Fudge (2014) explores constitutional issues relevant to labeling Juggalos as a street gang and discussed other critical legal observations in pursuing this logic. Fudge (2014) argues that the courts should take a more "holistic" approach to the gang problem especially when trying to determine the definition of a gang definition and how law enforcement applies that to criminal and non-criminal groups.

Lastly, Bringer and Walton's (2015) research explores the history of ICP and the Juggalos and outlines the numerous crimes Juggalos have committed across the United States including assaults, drug trafficking, vandalism, burglary, shooting, theft, robbery, and murder. While this book is more of a list of references on Juggalo related information, it provides the reader with a good amount of source material to further examine Juggalo gangs and the crimes they have committed.

The LAWSUIT

In 2014, the ACLU in Michigan filed a civil lawsuit on behalf of the Juggalos and ICP contesting the gang designation defined by the FBI and DOJ (see Parsons et al v. United States Department of Justice et al 2014). The ACLU argued that labeling the band and its followers, the Juggalos, as a "hybrid" gang was undeserving, unconstitutional and resulted in serious harm. The ACLU (2014) claimed that the FBI/DOJ, the Defendant's in the case, violated the Administrative Procedure Act for three reasons. First, the gang classification infringes on the First Amendment right to freedom of expression and the Fifth Amendment's Due Process Clause. Second, "branding the group as a gang is arbitrary and capricious," despite the FBI/DOJ knowing that "only a small fraction of individuals have engaged in isolated criminal acts." Third, the Defendants gathered information about the Juggalos unlawfully and without reasonable suspicion (*Parsons et al v. United States Department of Justice* 2014:3–4).

One of the plaintiffs in the suit, Mark Parsons, was pulled over by a Tennessee State Trooper in Knoxville, TN for having a large Hatchet Man logo on the side of his truck. Parsons owned a general freight trucking company called Juggalo Express, LLC. Parsons claimed that the stop lasted over an hour, resulted in questions regarding Parson's "perceived" gang affiliation, and his vehicle was searched for weapons and other contraband. Despite these actions taken by law enforcement, Parsons did not receive a ticket or citation (ACLU 2014).

In Citrus Heights, CA (outside of Sacramento), the police stopped plaintiff Brandon Bradley for minor offenses (e.g., jaywalking) when officers noticed Juggalo tattoos and attire on his person. A gang squad officer took dozens of photos of his clothes, face, and Bradley's tattoos. It is believed that Bradley is now in the police agency's gang database. Additionally, the Sacramento Sheriff's Department also stopped Bradley for displaying Juggalo paraphernalia, leading authorities to believe that he is also a gang member (ACLU 2014).

Another plaintiff in the case concerns Scott Gandy who had a large ICP-related tattoos on his chest when trying to enlist in the Army. Once Army recruiters acknowledged that his tattoo was synonymous with a criminal street gang, he was denied. It is believed that his perceived gang affiliation is the reason for not being accepted to the Army (ACLU 2014). Another enlisted Army member, plaintiff Robert Hellin, believed that, because of the Juggalo gang designation, his identity as a Juggalo "places him in imminent danger of suffering discipline or an involuntary discharge from the Army" (ACLU 2014).

Lastly, in October 2012, plaintiffs Joseph Bruce and Joseph Utsler of Insane Clown Posse had their annual musical event, known as "Hallowicked", canceled in Royal Oaks, MI because the Royal Oak Police Department discovered that the FBI had identified Juggalos as a gang. This gang designation was enough to cancel the event resulting in a substantial financial loss for ICP (ACLU 2014).

According to the ACLU (2014) and ICP, the repercussions of a Juggalo lifestyle has had detrimental effects. For example, being labeled a gang member gives law enforcement officials probable cause to stop and question a Juggalo as a suspected gang member. Furthermore, if

a Juggalo is found guilty of a crime, the type of punishment in some States increases as the result of gang enhancement laws (U.S. DOJ 2009). While some complaints filed against the FBI/DOJ include seeking employment and military obligations, others include tattoo parlors fearing reprisal from law enforcement or local business City Councils for attempting to tattoo the ‘hatchet man’ on a person when the symbol is deemed a gang identifier (Childers 2018), and custody battles (Matthews 2017). Furthermore, according to ICP, they also lost critical merchandizing contracts with Hot Topic and Spencer’s Gifts. Bruce (aka, Violent J) expressed his concern with vendors not carrying their merchandise anymore – “When (the FBI) made that list, stores like Hot Topic and (expletive), a lot of them stopped carrying our (expletive). They were like: ‘We aren’t carrying gang apparel’” (Lacey 2012). Ironically, this statement was later found to be false. Hot Topic and Spencer’s Gifts along with many online stores continue to sell ICP merchandise but the quantity of the merchandise has significantly diminished (Lacey 2012).

Despite the legal arguments made to the Courts, a U.S. District judge dismissed the lawsuit in 2014, claiming that the FBI gang designation is “descriptive,” and not “prescriptive,” therefore, no law is being violated (Ohlheiser 2014). However, ICP challenged this decision and won an appeal for their case to be heard with the United States Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals. In October 2017, ICP once again failed to demonstrate to the Court that the Juggalo gang designation in the 2011 NGIC report caused harm (Hawkins 2017). The Appeals Court stated that “harms caused by agency decisions are not legal consequences if they stem from independent actions taken by third parties” (Parsons et al. v. United States Department of Justice et al 2017: 7). In other words, those actions taken by third parties (i.e., law enforcement officials) can ultimately make their own decisions about Juggalos, and are not considered actions of the FBI. Therefore, the FBI/DOJ is not responsible for any civil wrongdoings.

Method

To best understand the dynamics of the Juggalo culture, the researchers attended the Juggalo March (i.e., rally) in Washington, D.C. at the base of the Lincoln Memorial by the reflection pond and marched around the Washington Monument. The goal of this qualitative participant observation study was to observe Juggalo behavior and determine if it was consistent with the FBI’s gang designation of a “loosely-organized hybrid” gang. Ultimately, the task was to “hang out” with the Juggalos in hopes to better understand the subculture. To adequately gain insight into the Juggalo culture, Bachman and Schutt (2011: 287) acknowledge that the challenges of any participant observation study is to involve oneself in the group, let a few people in the group know of your research interests, and “develop a rapport” to gain some insight about the group. This was the goal and purpose of this participant observation.

The data collected for this study took place from 10:00 am until 11:30 pm on September 16th, 2017. Each researcher collected data via an unstructured participant observation. The researchers split up and spent the day informally interviewing and observing the participants of the rally, including those who were self-proclaimed Juggalos as well as law enforcement officials. Field notes recorded the observations of the researchers, and unsolicited commentaries and dialogue between Juggalos were documented. All these observations provided valuable information as to the motivations and justifications for supporting the position that Juggalos are not in a “gang” but rather a “family.” The observations also provided valuable information as to supporting the claim that Juggalos are in fact a “hybrid” gang as recognized by the FBI.

If an individual attending the event asked about the identity of the researchers, it was revealed to them. The researchers also engaged in what is known as the “action perspective.” The “action perspective” is where the observer (i.e., the researcher) must “be prepared to see the world through the eyes of the subject” (i.e., Juggalos) (Skolnick 2017: 308). Every effort was made to understand the Juggalo culture by listening, asking questions, and marching with the Juggalos for their cause. This provided valuable insight into the lives of Juggalos and their reasons for attending the Juggalo March and their continued frustration with the 2011 NGIC report and gang designation.

Observations

In observing the Juggalo March, the researchers made it a point to be unassuming. Unlike members of the news media with cameras and audio equipment, and journalists with pen and paper, the researchers did not carry a camera, video/audio recorder, or identify themselves as members of the media. The goal, though limited in scope and time, was to be a participant observer in the Juggalo March and further watch, listen, and learn about the Juggalo culture in order to determine if the Juggalos are in fact a “hybrid” gang. It was important for the researchers to not be viewed as media personnel; nor be viewed as an undercover police officer. It was evident from observing Juggalos that being interviewed and getting their story on television or in a newspaper was exciting to them. The Juggalos clearly displayed their eagerness and giddiness to talk to the media about what it means to be a Juggalo and why this rally was so important to them.

In order to get a more realistic perspective from the attending Juggalos, the approach was to blend in, make a concerted effort to not influence the subjects, and ask questions beyond the “why are you here?” Despite all the media criticism for planning the march, maintaining an objective, unbiased and open mind about this group was paramount for this study. The ability of the researchers to move from complete observer to covert observer (complete participant) was critical and gave the researchers unprecedented access to a deviant world (Bachman and Schutt 2011).

After collecting the participant observation data, there were four overarching themes that best explain the Juggalo March and the behaviors observed by the researchers. These themes both support and contradict the FBI’s designation of Juggalos as a gang.

Theme 1: demographics of juggalos

There is no official data on how many Juggalos exist in the United States. Some media reports estimate that number to be in the “tens of thousands” (Itzkoff 2013) and others estimate around 1–2 million Juggalos in the United States (Bringer and Walton 2015). As for those in attendance at the Juggalo March in Washington D.C., according to the promoters of the rally, an estimated 3000+ were in attendance (see www.juggalomarch.com) but the authors of this study dispute that estimation. The researchers estimated that approximately 1500–2000 people attended the Juggalo March.

While many news reports and law enforcement officials refer to Juggalos as young white males (Raferty 2010), this was not what the researchers observed. While most Juggalos did appear to be white, blacks and Hispanics were also represented at the rally. With regard to the age of Juggalos, the average age was approximately 30 years old, but the ages range from infants to 70+ years old. The gender breakdown also defied the common belief that Juggalos are primarily males. The researchers actually observed more females than males attending the rally. With regards to social class (i.e., socio-economic status), the researcher’s observations were consistent with previous reports about the types of employment Juggalos maintain which are consist with the lower or working class (see Sunderland 2015). The social class observation was based on countless interviews with attendees who were documented as bakers and cooks, construction workers, artists, retail workers, postal service employees, and the unemployed.

Overall, the positive attitudes Juggalos had for one another regardless of race, ethnicity and gender were universal. Everyone was welcome at the Juggalo March. Lastly, Juggalos traveled from all over the nation to attend the March, the furthest from Seattle, Washington. Interestingly, most of the participants interviewed were not from the immediate Washington D.C. area.

Theme 2: we are a family, not a gang!

One of the most profound and repeated statements expressed during the Juggalo March was, “We are a FAMILY, NOT a GANG!” This statement is in stark contrast to the FBI’s gang threat assessment report concluding that Juggalos are in fact a gang. This statement became a battle cry for the attendees and focus of the rally. Although the Juggalo March was considered nothing more

than a publicity stunt (Connor 2017), the researchers observed how Juggalos cared for one another with acts of kindness, and verbally expressed their resentment for the gang label. For example, Juggalos often helped each other throughout the day such as getting water for one another, helping a pregnant woman sit down, playing with kids, sharing food, holding hands, offering a chair to older Juggalos, playing Frisbee, listening to music, laughing, and enjoying each other's company. For many Juggalos, this was a family event with young and old in attendance. The Juggalos often chanted, "We are a FAMILY! NOT a GANG!" and "FAM-uh-LEE!" The Juggalos were also very friendly with the media and to complete strangers (like the authors of this study).

Ironically, Juggalos were also found to be very respectful towards those law enforcement officials in attendance at the march. Despite the animosity and hostility towards law enforcement, specifically the FBI, the Juggalos were often seen interacting with the police, thanking them for their presence and protecting their right to freedom of speech. Juggalos were also observed offering bottled-water and snacks to the police. While this behavior was a serious contradiction to the many protest signs expressing hatred towards the FBI such as 'F**k the FBI,' 'The FBI is a GANG,' and 'WE are NOT a Gang', it was evident that the animosity was towards the FBI and not local law enforcement officials. Interestingly, when ANTIFA, an anti-fascist militant group showed up, this did not resonate well with many Juggalos. ANTIFA is known to disrupt rallies and even become violent. While law enforcement was aware of ANTIFA's presence and scrutinized their movements, it was apparent that ANTIFA was not welcome at this rally by the Juggalos. "We don't want them here" (referring to ANTIFA), stated one Juggalo supporter. "We want the police and everyone to know that we are a family and not a gang." Many Juggalos expressed their discontent about the presence of ANTIFA and had asked them to leave throughout the day. By early evening, ANTIFA left the rally.

Theme 3: group identifiers

Anyone approaching the reflection pond at the base of Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. would quickly recognize who was attending this protest rally. All the common identifying characteristics associated with ICP and the Juggalos were present: Hatchet Man signs/posters, uniquely braided hair called spider-weaves, faces painted as clowns, chants of 'Whoop Whoop', hand signs by crossing their arms and making a 'W' and a 'C' with their fingers to signify 'Wicked Clown', tattoos, and posters/banners with the faces of ICP's Violent J and Shaggy 2 Dope. Based on the researcher's observations, it was estimated that over 75% of the attendees had either a sign/poster or some type of clothing attire (i.e., t-shirt, baseball jersey, and jacket) or accessory (i.e., hat, bandanna, and jewelry) that identified with ICP and/or Juggalo culture. One of the most visible identifiers besides the Hatchet Man logo were the display of tattoos on many of the attendees. Many of the tattoos were of the Hatchet Man but also many of the "Joker Cards" were visible on all parts of the body. Those with tattoos showed them proudly as if it were a badge of honor.

Theme 4: enter the deviant behavior

While most of the day was filled with pro-social behavior, all that changed when ICP entered the stage later that evening. Prior to ICP's free public concert, the organizers of the rally gave speeches, including legal counsel for ICP, those who were victimized by the gang label told their story of injustice, and Violent J and Shaggy 2 Dope ICP spoke at the rally prompting cheers and chants. However, at 9:00 pm, ICP took the stage and the behavior of those faithful supporters changed. The concert was a spectacle as clowns danced on stage and Violent J and Shaggy 2 Dope began their theatrics by spraying the soft drink Faygo onto concert-goers. While the iconic artists rapped their violent and vulgar lyrics, Juggalos sang along with ICP repeating the lyrics to every song. As the concert continued, the audience got more violent, body slammed each other, and climbed onto and jumped off the stage into the audience. While this type of behavior might seem normal for attending an ICP concert, there was an observable

difference in the behavior from those same individuals who participated in the rally/march during the day to when the concert began later that evening. One common Juggalo chant expressed during the concert was the saying, “We will never die alone, Juggalos will carry on, swing our hatchets if we must, each and every one of us!” The most significant and illegal behavior observed was the use of marijuana. It was passed around and shared by concert-goers. No alcohol was present.

Discussion and conclusion

The intense scrutiny in which law enforcement officials, legislators and concerned parents have towards ICP, particularly with regard to their lyrics and how the band markets their image, is nothing new. Analyzing and criticizing music has existed since the birth of rock-n-roll, and continues today with Hip Hop, rap, and ‘gangsta rap.’ For example, in 1956, Elvis Presley was banned from performing a concert in Corpus Christie, TX because his music was perceived to be a contributing factor to juvenile delinquency (Hanson 2011). In the 1980s, the Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC) pushed for voluntary ratings on albums, similar to how the movie industry rates its films. The PMRC found a variety of songs objectionable including a handful dubbed the “Filthy Fifteen” (Nuzman 2001). The bands/artists included on this list were Twisted Sister, Judas Priest, Motley Crue, AC/DC, W.A.S.P., Black Sabbath, Prince, and even Cyndi Lauper and Madonna. The PMRC’s concern for the questionable lyrics written by these artists prompted a Senate Commission Hearing in September of 1985 (United States Senate 1985). As the result of this hearing, the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) agreed to put “Parental Advisory” labels on explicit albums.

Despite the warning labels, the legal pursuit against bands and their music has not waned over the years, especially when the lyrics are about sex, violence and crime/criminal behavior. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Ozzy Osbourne and Judas Priest faced similar lawsuits involving the suicide deaths of teenagers. It was argued by the plaintiffs (parents of the victims) that the lyrics of ‘Suicide Solution’ by Ozzy and ‘Better by You, Better than Me’ by Judas Priest, prompted the teens to commit suicide. Both cases were eventually dismissed by the courts, citing artists are protected under the First Amendment. Furthermore, the courts determined that the lyrics to each song was not responsible for the suicides (see Vance/Roberson v. CBS Inc./Judas Priest 1989; Waller v. Osbourne 1991). In another case, 2 Live Crew was targeted for their sexually explicit material on their 1989 album *As Nasty as They Want to Be*. In Broward County (FL), a district court judge ordered that if any record store owner sold this album they would be subject to an arrest for violating the obscenity laws. 2 Live Crew challenged that order and a few years later, the United States 11th Circuit Court of Appeals overturned the earlier ruling, stating that the band and their music were protected by the First Amendment (*Luke Records, Inc., et al. vs. Nick Navarro, Sheriff, Broward County, Florida* 1992; see also Keppler 2016). Then, in 1992, the ‘gangsta rap’ group NWA became a frequent target of the police, politicians and others for their overtly anti-police rhetoric, violence, glorification of gang life, and misogynistic references. With other artists following the ‘gangsta rap’ genre during the 1990s, Congress addressed this problem with a Congressional Hearing with the Senate Juvenile Justice Subcommittee. The Subcommittee was tasked to examine the lyrics of ‘gangsta rap’ and its impact on society (United State Senate 1994). No legislation was enacted at the conclusion of this hearing.

Musicians and bands targeted by various interest groups, lawmakers and law enforcement officials, in an effort to challenge the content of an artist/band’s music, are generally futile. However, all that changed when Insane Clown Posse became more popular with teenagers and young adults in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The focus is now on the followers. This is a clear shift away from blaming the artist/band for invoking some type of deviant or illegal behavior to directly blaming those who listen to the music. The current case ICP vs. FBI/DOJ is not so much about ICP; but rather it is about the Juggalos. This is a fundamental change, whether intentional

or not, in how rule-makers label the followers of an artist/band as deviant; or in the case of the Juggalos, as criminal. With the focus no longer on the artist/band, it is the fans who are now targeted and labeled by law enforcement and seen as a threat to society. However, ICP fans are not the only ones who have been targeted by the police. In fact, according to *Relix*, a magazine dedicated largely to the Grateful Dead noted that the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) began to target “Deadheads” back in the 1980s because of their known reputation for selling and using drugs at concerts (New York Daily News 1994). While selling narcotics is illegal, for law enforcement to assume that most or all “Deadheads” are trafficking and using drugs is erroneous. This is no different than the erroneous perception that police have about Juggalos and their association to street gangs.

The dilemma for law enforcement officials when attempting to identify Juggalo gangs from non-Juggalo gangs can be compared with how law enforcement deals with differentiating between motorcycle club riders and Outlaw Motorcycle Gang (OMG) members. It is often asserted in the media that the American Motorcycle Association (AMA) once stated that 99% of all of their members are “good, decent, law-abiding citizens” and only 1% are the “outlaw” riders (Dulaney 2005). However, according to the AMA, this is in fact a fictional statement, but the problem still exists for law enforcement trying to differentiate Motorcycle Clubs from OMGs (Dulaney 2005). Just because they “look” the part of a gang member or they have identifying symbols that might link them to a gang, this may not necessarily indicate that an individual is associated with a gang.

As Juggalos continue to be targeted and labeled as a gang, the gang classification has serious implications as outlined in the lawsuit. Sociologist and gang expert Malcom Klein noted that gang databases and how law enforcement disseminates information about street gangs is problematic. Klein (1995: 189) expressed his concern, in particular with federal agents, that “they [federal agents] transmit its conspiratorial, drug-connection view to all area officers and thereby shapes the form and substance of local descriptions.” The ICP lawsuit against the FBI/DOJ reflects Klein’s statement. It is evident that local police officers are relying on the National Gang Threat Assessment Report to help them identify the latest gang trends. For those officers not familiar with ICP, their music and the culture of the Juggalos, using the information outlined in the NGIC report about Juggalos validates the law enforcement response.

In addition to the gang threat assessment reports, gang databases is another tool for law enforcement to utilize in order to combat the gang problem in their community. Klein (1995) notes that the importance of information sharing on gangs is critical to addressing the gang problem, however, he argues that the danger of labeling someone a gang member when they are not, can have a negative effect. There is substantial criticism for using gang intelligence databases because once a name is entered in the database, the name is in the system for life. It becomes very difficult to remove that label. However, more importantly, incorrectly applying a gang label leads to other negative consequences that impact the educational, social, and economic opportunities of an individual (Jacobs 2009).

Another concern for wrongfully identifying an individual as a gang member are the potential punishment consequences for when one does commit a crime and is found guilty. In some states, gang enhancement laws result in longer prison sentences for a crime committed by an individual who is identified as gang member (United State Department of Justice 2009).

For those who are not gang members, a “perceived” labeled obviously impacts future interactions with law enforcement. As for those Juggalos who follow ICP’s music and are law-abiding citizens, their unfortunate association with ICP increases the likelihood of law enforcement misidentifying them and further classifying them as a gang member. Simply being a fan of ICP can have devastating effects. Unfortunately, not understanding the Juggalo culture and knowing the difference between Juggalo gangs and non-Juggalo gangs is problematic for all. Therefore research into the Juggalo world is necessary to help bridge the gap between those in a gang and those not in a gang. As the ICP lawsuit gained more attention in the media and still could be heard at the U.S. Supreme Court, it became apparent that a study on the Juggalos was necessary.

The purpose of this study was to attend the Juggalo March and present a qualitative approach to the events throughout the day in the form of a participant observation. Most of the literature about

Juggalos are written from the journalists' perspective or in the form of a video documentary, and not as a scholarly endeavor. Prior to the Juggalo March in September 2017, the media were either supporting claims that the Juggalos were improperly identified as a gang or that the Juggalo March was a publicity stunt to garner more sales of ICP music and merchandise. With little to no academic research on the Juggalos, this rally gave the researchers an opportunity to explore the Juggalos, the potential association to gangs, and examine the claims made by law enforcement officials including any deviant behaviors.

The general consensus of the participant observation was that everyone attending the Juggalo March, who identified themselves as Juggalos, treated each other like they were family. Many Juggalos interviewed viewed themselves as outsiders to the norms of American culture. They are a misunderstood and disenfranchised group. In addition to the family atmosphere, the police had a strong presence at the rally, keeping a watchful eye for incorrigible individuals. Ironically, despite the animosity that Juggalos have towards the FBI, there was tremendous support and respect towards local law enforcement officials attending the Juggalo March.

While Juggalos might express themselves as a family, the researchers observed that their actions and characteristics resemble the common gang identifiers and gang-like behavior typically associated with street gangs. It came as no surprise that the Juggalos were on their best behavior towards one another, especially towards law enforcement. Juggalos were also very respectful of the facility/grounds, picking up trash. The only deviant or inappropriate act during the rally prior to the ICP concert was the general use of profanity. Phrases shouted were "F**k the FBI," "F**k that S**t" and "You f**ked up!" Any tourist or passerby with young children would not approve of the language used by the Juggalos. After the speeches and chants, ICP led the Juggalo March around the reflection pond and the Washington Monument. While there were no illegal behaviors observed during the day, at night things were very different. Once the ICP concert began, drug use (primarily marijuana and some cocaine) and mild-violence were observed. The mild-violence consisted of pushing, shoving, body-surfing and body-slammng each other during the concert. It was noted that these types of concert-behaviors were no different than attending any other typical rock/rap concert.

One of the key questions in this study was to determine if law enforcement correctly identified the Juggalos as a "loosely-organized hybrid gang." Based on the researchers' observation, the Juggalo March did not clarify this issue. However, by applying the typical identifying characteristics of what a street gang is then there are common features that support the gang definition such as: group, symbols, colors, tattoos, monikers, and other unique identifiers. For example, Juggalos used the "Hatchet Man" as their identifying symbol, which is also the logo for Psychedelic Records. The "Hatchet Man" is a symbol used to identify Juggalos similar to how the 5-pointed crown is related to the Latin Kings and the 5- and 6-pointed star are linked to the Vice Lords and the Gangster Disciples, respectively. Juggalos favorite color is red/white or black/white. This is similar to the Bloods, Norteños and United Blood Nation who also support the color red. Gangs also use graffiti and hand signs to communicate with one another. The researchers observed that Juggalos have two common hand signs: the "Wicked Clown" where one uses their fingers to make a 'W' and a 'C,' and "Juggalo Love" where the hands come together and the thumb and pointer finger are extended to form the letters 'J' and 'L.' Again, these types of gang identifiers are no different than when Bloods and Crips use their fingers to signify the letters 'b' and 'c' to identify with their gangs. Other Juggalo gang identifiers include tattoos (the Hatchet Man logo or the 'joker card' album covers), and clothing attire (baseball jerseys with various ICP and Psychopathic Record logos).

While the four themes observed in this study partially validate the claims made by law enforcement officials across the country that Juggalos are in fact a gang, the observations also support the argument that Juggalos are not a gang. Despite the law enforcement data suggesting that there are over one million self-proclaimed Juggalos across the United States (NGIC 2011), the majority of Juggalos, particularly those attending the rally, were peaceful, non-criminal music fans. This disconnect creates problems for law enforcement officials, Juggalos, and ICP. With so few gang-related crimes committed by Juggalos when compared to other types of gangs, there are

still valid concerns expressed by law enforcement when dealing with Juggalos. Thus, the challenge for law enforcement is to distinguish from those Juggalos who follow the music and those who belong to a Juggalo gang.

There is no doubt that what the researchers observed was a controversial subcultural group displaying a unique behavior at odds with societal norms and law enforcement perceptions. As sociologist Erich Goode (1996: 8) noted “what makes an act deviant is what certain people (or audiences) make of this act – what they think and how they react to it... What makes an action (or condition) deviant is the actual or potential condemnation that it would attract from observers or ‘audiences.’” Based on the researchers’ participant observation of the Juggalo March, the Juggalos are viewed as a deviant subculture. While gang behaviors were not clearly observed, except for drug use, the gang identifiers were clearly present within the Juggalo culture. Those gang identifiers and the Courts decision to support the FBI’s gang designation further validates that Juggalos are a “loosely-organized hybrid gang.” While ICP and the ACLU can still appeal their case to the US Supreme Court, it should be noted that the FBI has since removed the Juggalos from their biennial national gang threat assessment reports (see NGIC 2013, 2015). This omission by the FBI puts into question the validity of recognizing Juggalos as a gang. Regardless, this gives pause for the need to conduct additional research on this deviant group, and to further determine if Juggalos are a gang or not.

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